DECLASSIFIED

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Ben Fader DATE Sep 6 14
RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE
IS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
RELEASED ☑ RELEASABLE ☑
RELEASE DENIED ☐
FOIA EXEMPTIONS

RESTRICTED

PALESTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

The Refugee Problem in Concrete Terms

Working Paper Prepared by the Secretariat

I. Purpose of the paper

The following remarks, based on very scanty information, are simply intended to show that the method of returning the refugees to their homes is as much involved in the solution of the refugee problem as this problem is involved in the whole Palestine question. It would appear, therefore, that a detailed study of the refugee question and the various possible methods of its solution might be useful before commitments are made in general terms.

II. Remarks concerning:

A. The numerical aspect of the problem

The total figure for Arab Palestinian refugees is given as approximately 700,000 - 800,000. Of these a certain unknown number are assured to be not bona fide refugees but destitute Arabs taking advantage of refugee relief. Another section of the total are refugees from areas outside Israeli territory as defined by the partition plan. This section includes all those from Western Galilee, Jaffa, the Lydda-Ramle area, Jerusalem and its corridor, and the occupied parts of the Gaza and Hebron districts. The refugees from Israeli territory proper (as defined by the partition plan) must be less than the total non-Jewish population (not including nomads) of that territory, which was estimated at some 400,000 souls.*

B. The demographic aspect

Of the total a large proportion was urban dwellers from Haifa, Acre, Jaffa, Lydda, Ramle and Jerusalem, possessing little or no land. (The total of these urban dwellers is estimated at approximately 250,000, of which not all have fled their homes.)

* See Appendices 1 and 2 for further figures.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

C. The occupational aspect

The rest, it must be assumed, belonged to the various social levels obtaining in rural Arab areas. Some were large landowners, some small landowners and share croppers; some were day labourers, skilled, unskilled and seasonal, and others artisans, tradesmen and professionals. In the towns there must have been the further categories of merchants, industrialists, entrepreneurs and industrial workers.

III. Assumptions regarding the wish to return

A. Of the agricultural population

It may be assumed that of these groups the large landowners will most wish to return, especially if by remaining away they are not to receive direct compensation for their losses. They will be a very small proportion of the total. The decision of the small landowners to return or not will depend to a great extent on the amount and quality of land that they had, in relation to the amount and quality that they will receive in their new country of residence. Their estimate of the conditions that will await them in Israel will also determine their decision to a considerable degree. The agricultural day labourers will have no incentive to return, especially if they know that their houses have been destroyed. It is problematic whether the possibility of higher wages in Israel will be a greater incentive than land of their own in the Arab countries.

B. Of the non-agricultural rural population

Artisans, tradesmen and professionals from the rural districts will have little hope of resuming their old occupations amid an alien and hostile population. In any event they would opt for the towns. The question of their admission in Israeli labour unions also arises.

C. Of the urban population

The urban population will probably be, as a general rule, more eager to return. (A certain amount of Arabs has remained throughout in the larger towns and their survival has dispelled some of the more extreme fears of the exiles). Those who have capital might hope to start afresh in an economically expanding country. The workers (especially skilled industrial workers) will be attracted by higher wages and there will be little to attract them in the Arab countries, especially in agricultural Transjurdan.

IV. The concrete problem of resettlement

A. Of the productive elements of the population

As far as the resettlement or repatriation of agricultural workers and their families is concerned, the problem of rendering them once more pro-

DECLASSIFIED

RESTRICTED

ductive and self-supporting presents many of the same aspects whether they return to Israel or stay in the Arab countries. Forgetting for a moment the question of the land to which they would return or on which they would be settled, it is evident that their absorption will present an economic and a social problem.

1) From the economic point of view

From the economic standpoint, it is unavoidable to conclude that these people will have to be subsidized for a year at least, until they can produce their own harvest, unless they are absorbed by going Israeli agricultural concerns. They are at present destitute and have no margin of savings that would permit them to be independent of relief, even for a short period. They have no seed corn, implements or animals. Whether they returned to their own lands on Israel or were granted land in Arab countries, this land would at least have to be ploughed and sown. In certain areas new land have to be reclaimed from the wilderness. Even if they set to work almost immediately, they would not be in time to sow for a summer crop and they would have to wait a year for the winter crop to ripen. During this period they would not only need relief in food but also a loan or a grant of seed corn and implements in money or in kind. They would also need s one form of shelter until they could build themselves houses. (A great number of villages have been destroyed willfully or accidentally. Similar considerations apply to the industrial elements).

2) From the social point of view

As regards the social aspect of the problem, it is obvious that a number of families working the land do not automatically constitute a healthy and viable community. In the long run, and if the economic and political conditions are favourable, it can be assumed that this group of people with more or less common interests and customs will either produce or attract the other elements of a normal social body. The same is true of an industrial community.

B. Of the not-directly productive elements

This last observation applies in reverse to the other sections of the refugee population - i.e. the artisans, the tradesmen, the professionals and the rest. As long as the productive element of the population is on relief they cannot hope to be absorbed by the community in any fruitful capacity, but as soon as the community resumes its productive functions on a sound basis, they will automatically find their places within it. This state of affairs, however, involves a hiatus of months and even years during which the professional section of the population will require relief, at least as far as food, clothing and medical attention are concerned.

Paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's resolution states that the Assembly

RESTRICTED

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

V. The General Assembly Resolution

A. General considerations

"RESOLVES that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to the property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;

"INSTRUCTS the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations".

B. Concrete implications of a strict interpretation concerning the returning refugees

The execution of the first part of this paragraph would involve a number of possible immediate steps:

The establishment of who are the refugees who wish to return to their homes.

1) As regards preliminary measures for their return

This would involve a kind of plebiscite among the refugees by the Conciliation Commission. (Perhaps those wishing to return could be required to submit applications to this effect to the Conciliation Commission.)

a) Establishing who wishes to return
b) Checking the validity of their claims

Those wishing to return would have to prove that their homes were actually in Israeli territory. (This would involve checking birth registers, land registers, etc. - Do these archives of the Government of Palestine exist and are they available to the Conciliation Commission?)

c) Surveying their homes

It would involve a survey of their land to ascertain whether or not it is unoccupied and whether their respective houses are habitable.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

2) As regards measures to be taken during actual period of return

a) Establishment of Israeli screening commission

The creation of the machinery for their return. It would presumably imply the establishment of an Israeli screening commission for the purpose of establishing whether each returning refugee was and intends to be a law-abiding and loyal citizen of Israel. (The refugees admitted would then presumably be required to swear an oath of allegiance to the State of Israel. Those of military age might be required to perform their military service, probably in support of labour battalions.)

b) Establishment of Transit Camps

During the period of the actual return and until the financing and relief system could function properly, transit camps would have to be established in Israel from which the refugees could be distributed to their respective homes as the conditions became favourable, and to which they could return should they find living conditions impossible.

c) Establishment of Israel machinery for accepting, facilitating and protecting resettlement of refugees

The Government of Israel would have to accept the specific claims of each refugee on his land and permit him to return to it with his family and commence working on it. (Should only a part of the Arab population of a village or town return and if the rest of the village is occupied by Jewish immigrants, the Government of Israel would have to assure the protection of the Arab inhabitants, both physically and economically, and also assure the respect of their rights as citizens).

3) As regards measures during and after their resettlement

a) Relief in kind

The Conciliation Commission or the body appointed by it would have to divide the refugees wishing to return into geographical groups which would be supplied by a single soup kitchen unit after their return to their homes, if the relief were to be in food, with a roving unit supplying their other needs, such as medical attention, etc.

b) Relief in money

If the relief were to be given in the form of a dole, a roving unit might undertake the distribution over a much larger area. (It might be possible to require the Israeli municipal authorities where the population is mixed, or the Anglo-Palestine Bank, to fulfill this function under the supervision of a United Nations Comptroller).

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

c) Rehabilitation

Besides this purely temporary and relief operation, a second fund would have to be established, consisting of international grants or long-term loans and a certain sum to be paid by Israel as security against the claims of the returning refugees for loss of or damage to their property. This fund could be used to equip the immediate needs of the agricultural population on a long-term loan basis, or to assist promising industrial concerns or to finance larger projects that would absorb the unemployed Arab population. (This operation too might be handled by the Israeli banks under United Nations supervision. It is uncertain whether Israel will be required to pay compensation for the loss of crops and time).

C. Implications concerning the refugees remaining in Arab countries

Measures parallel to those described in the last three paragraphs above would have to be undertaken in the Arab countries for those refugees not wishing to return to Israel, as well as for those refugees who come from areas that will be evacuated by Israel at the conclusion of the peace settlement.

D. Implications of this interpretation as far as Israel is concerned

1) As regards the number of refugees

Most of these measures would have to be coordinated with the Jewish programme for the resettlement of their own immigrants and it seems likely that the Government of Israel will consider this an impossibility unless it is given a fixed number on which to base its estimates, or at least a definite rate of influx of refugees.

2) As regards the duration of the operation

In either of these cases the return of refugees to Israel cannot be understood as a single operation to be completed at a specific date, but must be seen as a gradual process covering a period of time. The term used in paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's resolution "at the earliest practicable date" should be interpreted in this sense.

3) As regards the land

The reoccupation by scattered Arabs of pieces of land all over Israeli territory would probably greatly complicate the Jewish land resettlement projects. (It would be of interest to know the exact distribution of land owned by Jews and Arabs respectively in Israel, as well as the plans for the resettlement of immigrants as regards the land).

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

RESTRICTED

VI. Possible Israeli interpretation

It appears likely that Jewish intransigance with regard to the proposed return of refugees is caused mainly by their unwillingness to relinquish the land* that belonged to the refugees, and it is possible that Israel will insist on the interpretation of the term "to their homes" as entitling the refugees simply to return to Israel and not actually to their own lands.

A. Concrete implications of this interpretation

If this were the case, it might be more realistic and more beneficial for the Arabs if the Conciliation Commission required Israel to resettle those refugees wishing to return, under the same conditions that it applies to its own immigrants, i.e. in potentially self-contained groups. These groups would possess, in other place, land equivalent in quantity and quality to the total land that their members originally owned in scattered form.

B. Its possible advantages

Such a proposition might well be more acceptable to Israel, as it could easily be incorporated into existing overall land resettlement plans with international financial support. It would thus be possible for Israel to overcome both the social and economic dislocation that would be caused by an alien and destitute population, as well as the political and strategic danger that they so often refer to.

C. Its effects on the task of the Conciliation Commission

Whether this proposition would be acceptable to the Arab countries or to the refugees themselves is another matter. If it were acceptable to both sides in principle, the problem would change aspect and its solution would require different measures. The actual functions of the United Nations would be reduced to a supervision of the Israeli authorities where Arab refugees were concerned for the purpose of assuring that they received fair treatment.

D. Possible disadvantages of its non-application

Should this system be rejected, it is to be feared that the land of the returning refugees will be expropriated by the Israeli Government whenever this becomes necessary to their plans, or that the Arabs will be forced to sell by cut-throat economic competition. Thus the Arabs would soon be reduced to a landless state and would become hired labourers in Israel.

* See Appendix 3 for percentages of land ownership.

RESTRICTED

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

RESTRICTED APPENDIX 1

ESTIMATED POPULATION OF PALESTINE AS AT 31st DECEMBER 1946

	Moslems	Christians	Druse and Others	Bedouins	Total Arabs and Others	Jews	Total
ARAB STATE							
(a) Western Galilee	88,150	26,390	9,260		123,800	3,040	126,840
(b) Samaria and Judea	466,390	18,660	300		485,350	5,020	490,370
(c) Gaza	116,570	1,290	-		117,860	1,460	119,320
TOTAL	671,110	46,340	9,560	22,000	749,010	9,520	758,530
JEWISH STATE							
(a) Eastern Galilee	81,060	3,700	1,440		86,200	28,750	114,950
(b) The Plains of Sharon and Esdraelon	252,450	49,960	4,350	13,000	306,760	469,250	776,010
(c) Beersheba	11,600	210	10	92,000	103,820	1,020	104,840
TOTAL	345,110	53,870	5,800	105,000	509,780	499,020	1008,800
CITY OF JERUSALEM	60,560	44,850	130		105,540	99,690	205,230
SUMMARY							
ARAB STATE	671,110	46,340	9,560	22,000	749,010	9,520	758,530
JEWISH STATE	345,110	53,870	5,800	105,000	509,780	499,020	1,008,800
CITY OF JERUSALEM	60,560	44,850	130		105,540	99,690	205,230
TOTALS	1,076,780	145,060	15,490	127,000	1,364,330	608,230	1,972,560

RESTRICTED

APPENDIX 2

RESTRICTED

ESTIMATED POPULATION OF PROPOSED JEWISH STATE AS AT 31st DECEMBER 1946

Sub-District	Moslems	Christians	Others	Total Arabs	Jews	Total
(a) Eastern Galilee						
Safad	39,910	550	-	40,460	7,170	47,630
Tiberias	23,940	2,470	1,420	27,830	13,640	41,470
Beisan	16,660	680	20	17,360	7,590	24,950
Nazareth	550	-	-	550	350	900
TOTAL	81,060	3,700	1,440	86,200	28,750	114,950
(b) The Plains of Sharon and Esdraelon						
Nazareth	3,040	980	-	4,020	7,630	11,650
Haifa	90,380	30,990	3,990	125,360	119,010	244,370
Tulkarm	33,750	30	-	33,780	16,180	49,960
Jaffa	95,980	17,790	360	114,130	295,160	409,290
Ramle	26,500	170	-	26,670	29,970	56,640
Gaza	2,800	-	-	2,800	1,300	4,100
TOTAL	252,450	49,960	4,350	306,760	469,250	776,010
(c) Beersheba						
Gaza	5,330	-	-	5,330	510	5,840
Beersheba	6,270	210	10	6,490	510	7,000
TOTAL	11,600	210	10	11,820	1,020	12,840
TOTALS	345,110	53,870	5,800	*404,780	499,020	*903,800

* Note: The above figures do not include Arab Bedouins. The number of Bedouins in Palestine in 1946 has been estimated by the Palestine Administration at 127,000, of whom 105,000 reside in the area of the proposed Jewish State and 22,000 in the proposed Arab State.

RESTRICTED